6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
EH1 Greece EH1
Kotta

[Hill Villages]

621 x 178 villagers know that they are now much better off than the people in Yugoslav Macedonia, with whom they so recently felt a [197] [619] degree of kinship.

Since 1954 no representative of the Greek government has [631] lived in the village. An army detachment, which had been there from 1949, departed in 1954, leaving patriotic slogans on the walls of the buildings used as barracks. No gendarmes came to replace the soldiers. Hence the village has been left very largely to its own devices. The inhabitants like it that way. As is true [651] of all villages in Greece, the government no longer tries to collect direct taxes from Kotta (as it did before the war), but contents itself with a 2 per cent sales tax on products sold in town markets. This, for Kotta, amounts to paying almost no taxes at all, for the inhabitants sell almost nothing. This, too, pleases the villagers.

Kotta, therefore, is a community in which thoroughly old-[727] fashioned attitudes prevail. In spite of the harrowing guerrilla war – or rather because of it – life has resumed its old, familiar channels; and since everyone now has enough to eat without having to venture into the outside world, the villagers seem well content to settle down within their nearly self-sufficient valley and let the world go by.

621 161 x 178 The real question for the future is whether or not the village will proceed once again to breed children on the reckless scale that prevailed before. The age structure of the surviving popu-[728] lation is altogether anomalous, the removal of all children between the ages of two and fourteen in 1948 having left a great gap. Moreover, military losses and emigration overseas mainly affected young men and women of the next older age groups. The potentially childbearing population has therefore been drastically depleted, so much so that out of a total of seventy-[885] seven families in 1956, the village contained only four or five couples of childbearing age. (One must bear in mind that in a

6: McNeill H-5 (1947, 1956) 1957
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community where very early marriages have been the rule, a woman of thirty or thirty-five is already old.) Between 1952 and 1956 there were only four marriages in the village, twelve births, sixteen deaths. Under the circumstances, it seems certain that the population will decrease still further in the immediate future.

621
161
178 x
[885]

Yet even four or five families could turn out to be quite enough to repopulate the village, if the old patterns of early marriage and numerous children prevail. Indeed, the close blood relationships of all the villagers suggests that in times past the community may well have contained only a handful of families from whom hundreds (or, counting those overseas, thousands) in due course descended. Thanks to the depopulation brought by the guerrilla war, the traditional life of Kotta has become easy once again, and if the young people accept the old ways, and do not allow the glitter of urban life overseas, reflected in the letters and money orders sent back by friends and relatives, to change their outlook, then it seems fairly certain that within a decade or less the depopulation of the village will come to a halt, and rapid growth in numbers will begin once more. If so, after something like thirty or forty years Kotta will probably be back in the impossible position of 1947.

This cycle is, I believe, the key to much Balkan history. The peasant family system was adjusted, from age-old antiquity, to supply large numbers of children, most of whom died from violence or disease before attaining adulthood. With the more or less effective pacification of the countryside in the last couple of centuries, together with the elimination of some epidemic diseases and the control of others, this age-old balance was thrown out of kilter, so that the peasant population began (as early as the mid-eighteenth century) to run far ahead of the development of resources that might sustain it.

175
161
669